

Raise Tobacco

for trade or barter in hard times

By Rev. J.D. Hooker

Preparing for a crisis involves many things: storable foods, alternative power sources, dependable water supplies, medicines, guns, ammo, and such are readily available—for now—and this particular magazine has printed enough information on living and maintaining a self-sufficient lifestyle that every reader should already know at least the basics about preparing for nearly any crisis.

So probably the next most important thing we need to consider would be how we'd continue to manage should such crisis become an ongoing situation. If the worst happens, what options will we have available when it finally comes time to replenish or replace some vital item or other? Suppose you've just hammered in your very last nail, but the hardware store and lumber yard have both been closed for months. What can you do? What do you possess that someone else would be happy to trade for, and that you can afford to barter away? To put yourself more in demand, what can you have for

barter that no one else around you has considered?

One worthy answer that comes to my mind (possibly because of the cloud of rich burley smoke swirling from my pipe as I sit here writing this) is tobacco. Whether the person you're attempting to trade with is actually a nicotine addict or someone raising sheep that have developed a severe worm infestation, a supply of tobacco gives you negotiating power in a barter situation.

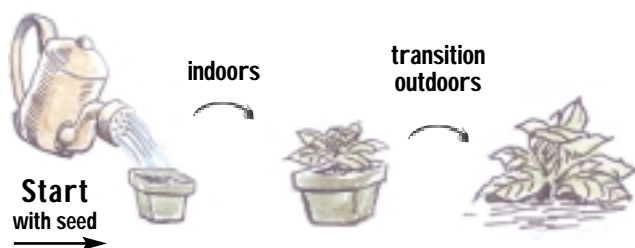
Some readers will recall an article I wrote on raising tobacco in Issue #38 (March/April 1996). At that time I was writing about raising tobacco for your personal use. Its many uses include medicinal remedies. Here I'll talk about providing yourself with a substitute for cash in bad times.

One difference I need to point out from the start is that while confirmed pipe smokers, like I, relish the wide range of tastes provided by growing the varieties available from Native Seeds/SEARCH that I mentioned in that earlier article, the vast majority of smokers puff away on cigarettes, not pipes or even cigars, and need a really consistent flavor.

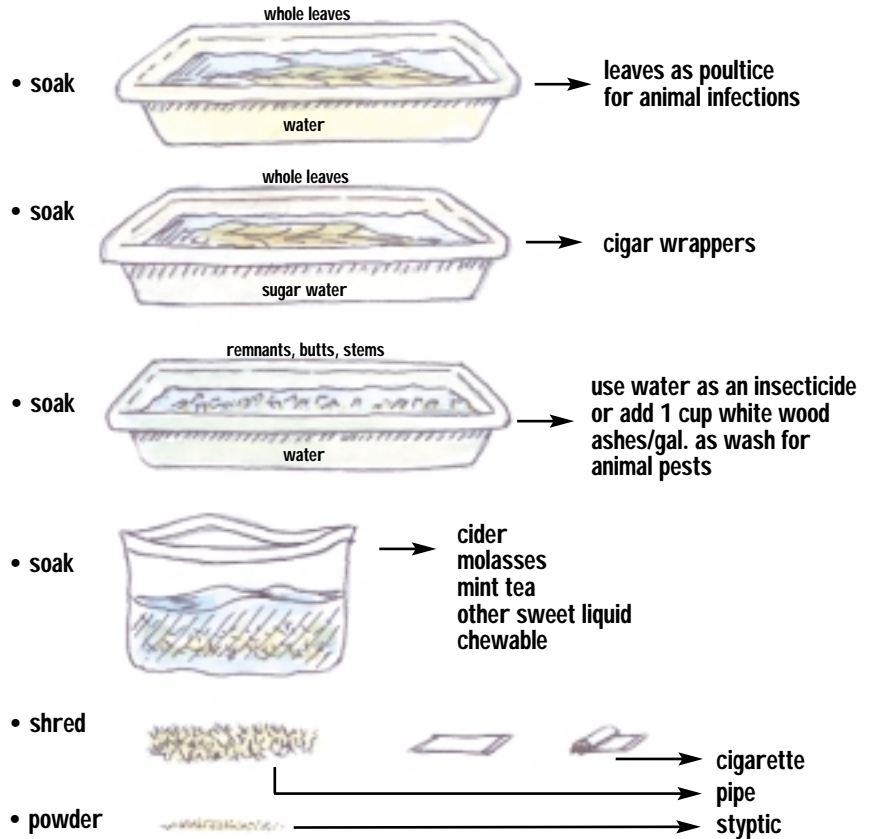
At the same time, when thinking of trade

value you'll need to consider quantity and ease of production as well. For this reason I recommend that most folks stick to raising white burley tobacco. I found seeds available for this variety from Gurney's Seed and Nursery Co., 110 Capitol St., Yankton, SD, 57079. Their Spring '99 catalog now lists this seed for \$3.69 for 1/32 oz. This is an easy variety of tobacco to grow and is probably the easiest to cure. It is also open-pollinated, producing capacious quantities of seeds for future plantings.

This past growing season we started some of this seed in one of the manure heated hot-beds I covered in an earlier *BHM* issue (Issue #53, Sept/Oct 1998) and some just on window ledges inside of the house, with equally good results. We used empty egg cartons instead of planting flats, filling these with a mixture of roughly equal portions of sand, well rotted compost, and garden soil. These seeds are very nearly as fine as dust, so I used tweezers to place the seeds just barely under the soil's surface.



plants 3ft. apart in rows 4 ft. apart



About seven or eight weeks prior to your area's final frost date seems to be the ideal time for starting these seeds indoors. Treat them just like you would tomato seedlings (which in fact are a close relative), being sure they remain warm and receive regular waterings and plenty of sunlight. Once outdoor planting time approaches, you need to harden these seedlings off in the same manner as tomato starts, gradually exposing them to lengthening periods of outdoor weather before setting them outdoors in their growing area.

When setting the diminutive little tobacco seedlings into the soil, it seems mighty wasteful of space to set them out three-feet apart, in rows four-feet apart. But once this variety stretches out and reaches its full height of five to eight feet, with many leaves measuring 18 to 25-inches long, things can start looking pretty crowded even with such liberal plant spacing. Cultivating to control weeds, regular waterings,

and weekly feedings of weak manure tea will help this crop produce to its full potential.

Don't bother with clipping off the flowers or the seed-heads as you need to with many other tobacco varieties; you can just let white burley produce all the seed it's capable of. Simply harvest the leaves individually as each one starts to die off and turn yellowish. Actually, in most cases, if you just string the leaves together on a cord (we use braided fishing line) and hang them indoors to dry thoroughly, most smokers will be sufficiently pleased with your product. When dried in an area where it's protected from direct sunlight, this variety ends up with a mild taste that's reminiscent of both cigarette and cigar smoke.

Should you expect your primary trading partners to be cigarette smokers (most likely the case), you'll want to dry most of your tobacco a bit quicker. We found that if you hang up the leaves in

the manner just explained, but only until they've turned a nice yellow color, then use heat (an oven or a food dehydrator) to finish drying the leaves out quickly, the taste of the end product was pretty well indistinguishable from commercial cigarettes.

While simply shredding or rubbing these dried leaves to produce a roll-your-own type of tobacco will provide you with a barter staple, most tobacco shops carry simple and inexpensive cigarette rolling machines which turn out a nicely finished product (especially interesting should you happen to be a cigarette smoker yourself). I did a little experimenting this past summer and found that using dried corn shucks, which have been cut to shape with one edge "gummed" using any sort of thick syrup (corn syrup, maple syrup, and simple sugar syrup all worked), along with one of these rolling machines, I could make a perfect substitute for ciga-

rettes rolled with commercially made rolling papers.

Should you have any interest in producing cigars for use as trade goods, a friend of mine who grew up raising tobacco as a cash crop showed me one method for making them and it works quite well.

Once the strung leaves are nearly dried, take them down and sort them, reserving the very best whole leaves for use as wrappers. Allow the wrapper leaves to soak in sugar water, watered down molasses, or some similar weak sweetener, until softened up. While these are soaking, use scissors to cut the other leaves lengthwise into very narrow shreds, discarding the thick center veins. Now use the whole softened leaves like giant sized rolling papers to hold the shredded filler tobacco together like a cigar. Bind each individual cigar tightly with cord until the wrapper has dried out very thoroughly, after which the sugar that's soaked into the wrapper will bind everything together nicely.

Another close friend who chews tobacco found this white burley to be perfectly acceptable after proper preparation. Once the leaves have been strung on a cord and dried completely, he crushes them with his hands and places them inside an airtight container. A ziplock plastic bag works well. Now he'll add just enough molasses, apple cider, heavily sweetened mint tea, or other sweet and flavorful liquid or syrup to moisten the tobacco. After it's been sealed up inside the container for a few more days to absorb the liquid, he says the results are equal to anything he's ever obtained from the store.

For smoking in my old briar pipe, I simply let the leaves dry slowly in a humid spot. Then I just keep them whole and tear enough off of a leaf to stuff my pipe as needed. I'm fairly certain that most other pipe smokers will be equally pleased with this method.

For several years we've also been using tobacco as a reliable livestock wormer. We've experienced good results. For

many years tobacco was the only stock wormer available and it worked very well. Feeding goats and other grazing animals about an ounce a month seems to keep them parasite free; stalks, stems, and leftovers all work equally well.

Aside from its value as a vermifuge, tobacco has always had a couple of other important medicinal uses as well. It has been used to treat minor livestock injuries, shaving nicks, or other relatively minor cuts and abrasions. Finely powdered tobacco makes one of the finest styptics or blood stop powders available, stopping minor bleeding immediately while preventing infection. In a similar manner, because of its natural anti-infective properties, we've found that a poultice of dampened tobacco leaves works wonders for cleaning infected wounds on animals. In our nation's early years, tobacco was so highly regarded for these attributes alone that a tobacco pouch was pretty well thought of as a basic first aid kit all by itself.

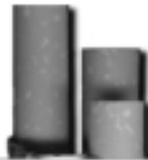
At present, several commercially available insecticides use tobacco, or one or more of its derivatives, as their active ingredient. Like many other gardeners, we've found that a mild tea steeped from tobacco stems, stalks, and wastes is exceptionally effective for eliminating insect pests from vegetables, bushes, and fruit trees. For our own use we dump about two ounces of tobacco into a 55-gallon plastic drum, fill the drum about two-thirds full with water, and allow this mixture to sit for several days. We then use a pump sprayer to apply this homebrewed insecticide wherever it's needed.

Several other gardening folks we know simply toss all of the cigar and cigarette butts they can collect into a container. They then add water and allow the mixture to set for a day or two before straining out the liquid and applying it in a similar manner. The two methods seem to be equally effective.

By adding about a cup of sifted white wood ashes to a gallon of this insecti-

cide, an effective flea, tick, and lice-killing wash is created for use against those irritating blood sucking pests on dogs and livestock.

Considering how inexpensive the initial cost of white burley seed, along with how easily the tobacco is grown and prepared, and all of the uses for the final product, you can see just how valuable a trading commodity tobacco can be. Δ



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